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## How a new Dante-themed hotel in Florence is

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As Florence marks the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, one hotel is offering a new take on the Divine Comedy

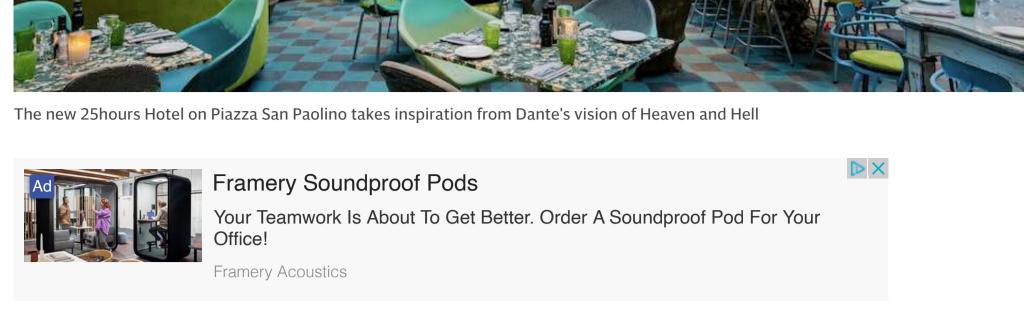
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By Max Wallis

Europe, Florence, Tuscany, Italy

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None of this should have come as a surprise, given that, when I walked into the lobby, the first thing a member of staff said to me was: "Are you staying in Heaven or Hell?" Hell, naturally. As you pass through the corridors, you hear the Italian actor Roberto Benigni reading Dante's epic.

The new 25hours Hotel on Piazza San Paolino, in the centre of the Tuscan capital,

takes as its theme Dante's Divine Comedy. Its interiors, bloody mirrors included,

The first thing I noticed about my room in Florence was "Welcome to Hell"

bed, with what looked like luggage tags dangling from it with the deadly sins

written on them. And the bathroom mirror had "Lucifero" daubed on it.

scrawled across the shower door. The second was a mobile, like a child's, above the

were designed by Paola Navone, who is based in Milan, to evoke the book. Navone was "very cautious about the idea at first", says Bart Spoorenber, general manager of the hotel. "She was afraid to offend the writer's legacy, but she has succeeded in giving it a light-hearted spin, without being disrespectful." As a hotel group, 25hours isn't known for these kinds of theatrical statements, but here it seems to work.

As Dante's birthplace, Florence has of late been marking the 700th anniversary of his death. All 100 cantos of The Divine Comedy were recited over 24 hours by Italian actors in the city. At the Basilica di Santa Croce, a digital installation by Felice Limosani was set to the sounds of choral music.



Beatrice whom he adored (more of her later). Still, they were rich, had four children

being burnt at the stake.

denied.

and prospered. By 1300 he was of such stature that he became a chief magistrate. But he was soon drawn into the roiling political controversy of the day, the battle between the Black Guelphs, who were pro-Pope, and the White Guelphs, who were more circumspect.

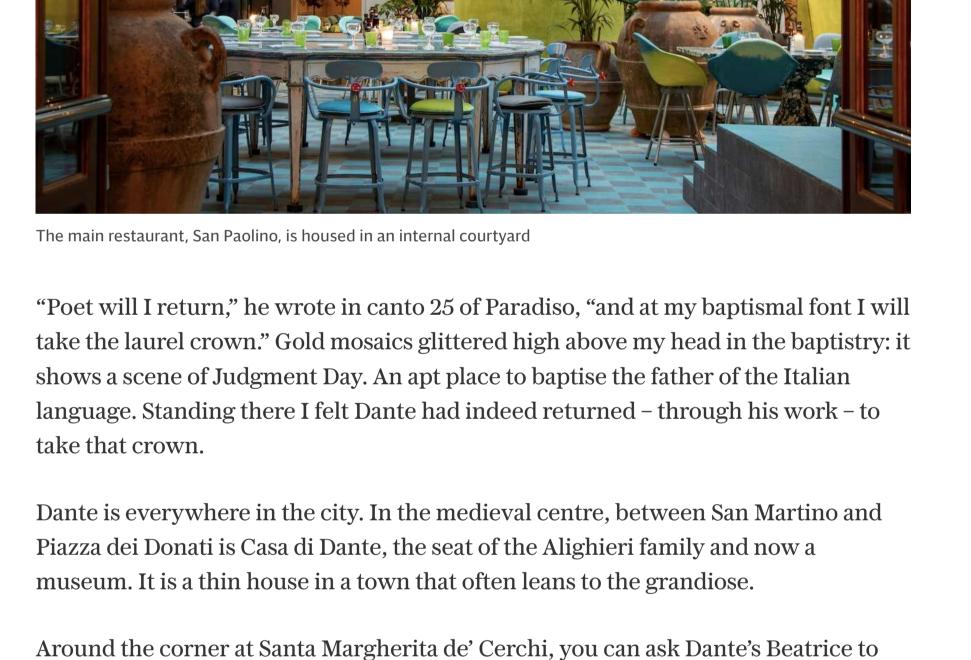
He joined the latter, and when the Black Guelphs took power, was exiled on pain of

So, he left the city of his birth in a huff. His masterwork and legacy, The Divine Comedy, became in large part a book about Florence. He was not always kind about it, writing of the place: "Florence, rejoice, now that you have such fame,/And over land and sea you spread your wings!/The whole Inferno's ringing with your name!" He died in Ravenna in 1321. Not, it must be said, by fire, but of malaria. I began my Dante deep dive with the newly restored mosaics of the Baptistery of San

Giovanni, where he was baptised and which he refers to as "my beautiful Saint

John" in canto 19 of Inferno. In exile, he hoped it would be a place of symbolic

amends and where Florence would give him the dignity and rank he was earlier



demure when I ordered a kilo of Florentine bistecca; in fact, he said, he and four friends once ate nine kilos between them. The slab of beef arrived with a perfect char - the apt work of the inferno grill - and buttery flesh that yielded to my knife. The 25hours Hotel aims to give Florentine hospitality a shock – and Dante is providing the voltage. It rejects the tradition of hotels in the city – the waiters don't wear black tie, and dogs are welcome. Dripping with theatrics, it is cosy, bold and

modern in a city where everything is ancient; using the literary past to shape the

iron out your love life by writing a note and putting it in a basket next to her shrine.

At the Palazzo Vecchio his death mask is sombre, plain, sullen. When I visited, it was

Back at 25hours I entered the third circle of hell - gluttony. The main restaurant,

San Paolino, is housed in an internal courtyard topped with a glass dome like a

cloche. When I took a seat at 8.30pm it was humming, and the waiter did not

just me and the mask, an almost eerie experience.

future.



doubles from £169 including breakfast

25hours Hotel Piazza San Paolino (00 39 055 29 66 911; <u>25hours-hotels.com</u>) offers

clutching a bottle of wine, the other clutching her. Dante would probably have

approved: Beatrice, his first love, guided him from Purgatory straight to Paradise in

"The path to Paradise begins in Hell," Dante wrote in Inferno. Who knew, then, that

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the book, too.

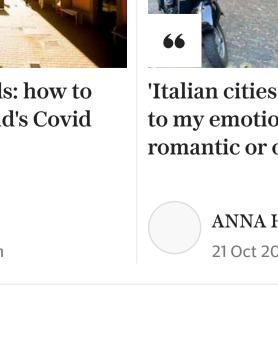
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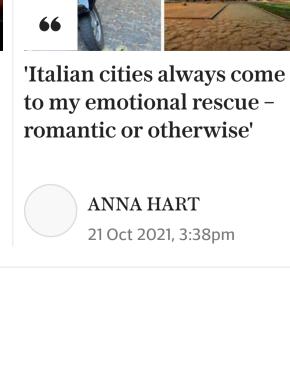
he was talking about a hotel room?

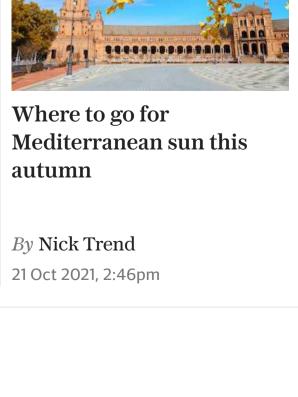
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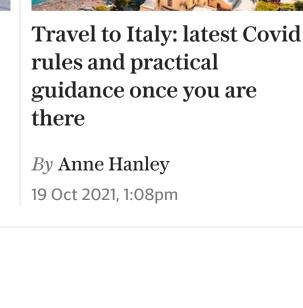




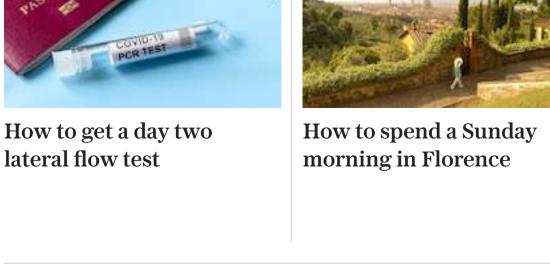








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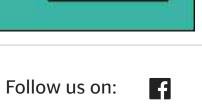






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